BASIC VIRTUES IN YOGA PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: *Yoga, in brief, is a scientific skill, the art of the practices of which lead the individual consciousness that is infatuated with or captive to forms of things to the universal consciousness. It is a spiritual technique to free the spirit from all the captives of phenomenal consciousness, including their causes. A stage where the individual body is in union with its mind and intellect; more specifically, a space where one is with his/her spirit, away from stereotyped daily engagements, and where one becomes one with the total energy that can make it act with expertise. One can enjoy this individual space by practicing any path of yoga, such as physical postures, prāṇāyām, self-restraint (yamas), moral conduct (niyamas), concentration, etc. One enjoys this space to refresh one's energy and enhance creativity. To support the soundness of the body, senses, mind, and intelligence, it is therapeutically important to purify oneself, culminating in discriminative knowledge of the spirit's real nature (puruṣa). The essential virtues of Yamas and Niyamas, if practiced universally in all times and situations, by all people, serve as an easy means of spiritual progress and social welfare.*

I. Introduction to Yoga

Yoga is one of the most valuable gifts Indian culture has given the world. Following UNESCO's declaration of the International Day of Yoga, communities worldwide are increasingly interested in learning more about the wisdom of this holistic therapeutic system. By holistic health, I mean the best actualization of the bodily, the psychic, the mind, the social, the moral, and the rational for final spiritual soundness, acquired through mastery of yogic practices. It believes that even an ordinary person, through constant and conscious yoga practice, can reach stations reserved for rare people. The Yoga Sutra is an example of excellent skill in managing thoughts and practices for individual and collective health and, finally, for achieving spiritual freedom.

Yoga, in brief, is a scientific skill, the art and practice of which leads the individual consciousness that is infatuated with or captive to forms of things to the universal consciousness, that is, the spirit free from all captives. A stage where the individual body is in union with its mind and intellect; more specifically, a space where one is with his/her spirit, away from stereotyped daily engagements, and where one becomes one with the total energy that can make it act with expertise. One can enjoy that space, which I call the individual's personal space, by practicing any path of yoga, such as physical postures, prāṇāyām, self-restraint (yamas), moral conduct (niyamas), concentration, and so on. One enjoys one's personal space, which refreshes one's energy and enhances creativity. To maintain the soundness of the body, senses, mind, and intelligence, one must purify oneself, culminating in discriminative knowledge of the spirit's

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real nature (puruṣa). Yogasūtra **(**YS henceforth**)** is written by sage Patanjali with a firm view that one can unravel and excavate the potencies and possibilities of one's body, muscles, psyche, reasoning, and spirit by following the yogic practices prescribed in the sūtras; one can realize the spirit, the true nature of man, by the practical path of purification and self- control. Not only that, but any practitioner who wants to excel in any of his abilities can gain benefits by practicing as prescribed; he can age with physical, mental, and spiritual soundness, and lastly realize his nature of spirit by following the system. One may ask: is it not against the freedom of spirit to follow the wired circuit of a system? In fact, running through a system is required to free the soul from the circuit. Utmost freedom cannot be achieved without having mastery and control over the circuit that confines the spirit in the cage of modifications of citta.

The Yoga system is often tied to Sāṃkhya. It is commonly taken that Sāṃkhya is the system of highest knowledge, whose metaphysics yoga takes for granted. Sāṃkhya is the theoretical part, while yoga is the practical part; together, they form a complete system. In fact, yoga's metaphysics, to an extent, helps Sāṃkhian metaphysics become more perfected and easier to understand. Different commentators on Sāṃkhya interpret the relation between the phenomenal and transcendental soul differently, forming their own theories. Despite that, they fail to give a genuinely convincing theory of the relation between prakṛti and puruṣa, matter and consciousness. However, yoga makes the issue clear through its philosophical clarity. The theistic Sāṃkhya issue is also inspired by yoga. The concept of Avidyā, its kind and role, is clear only in yoga, and it appears that Sāṃkhya does not analyze avidyā in its system as yoga does.

II. Etymological Derivation of the Term Yoga

The term 'yoga' derives differently in each system. In the context of Pātañjali's sūtra, it is derived as "yujir yoge," meaning the communion or merging of the phenomenal consciousness (cit) with the spirit (puruṣa, the transcendental consciousness). Vyāsabhāṣya takes it as "yogaḥ samādhiḥ" (yoga is absorption in the spirit). In this sense of spiritual absorption, it is derived as "Yuja samādhau." More precisely, yoga is the absorption of the phenomenal in transcendental consciousness.

Basic Virtues in Yoga Philosophy: According to the three categories of righteous persons (Uttama, Madhyam, and Adhama), the Yogasūtra of sage Patanjali prescribes three categories of Yogic Practices.

- **Abhyāsavairāgya Yoga**- prescribed for the highest category of persons who, by Abhyāsa and Vairāgya, accomplish Samādhi
- **Tapa, Svadhyaya Īśvarapraṇidhānd meant for the** Madhyama category of personeaspiritann
- **Eightfold paths of yoga**

The Yamas and Niyamas are the first two of the eightfold means of yoga (yama niyamāsana prāṇāyāma pratyāhāra dhāraṇā dhyāna samādhayo'ṣṭāvañgāni, YS 2/29); by practicing them, the impurities of body, senses, and mind are removed, and the practitioner gains discriminative knowledge (Vivekakhyāti- 2/28). In Yoga philosophy, Yamas and Niyamas are virtues whose practices aim at moral conduct and the cultivation of duties. Yamas assertively mean moral duties we must perform as members of society. Negatively, they are prohibitive and restrictive. For example, celibacy (Brahmacharya) is about the restriction of our sexual desires that is preventive of our illegal sex or sense of sex to females other than our legally married wife. All five Yamas have

a prohibitive or preventive spirit, in that they prevent violence, falsehood, theft, lechery, and greed in the performance of duties, thereby playing a significant role in making life and society good. The five Yamas must be practiced for self-cultivation, which is needed for an individual's spiritual journey. By following the Yamas, one attains welfare, and by following the Niyamas, one realizes one's well-being. Both the Social discipline (Yamas) and individual discipline (Niyamas) aim at one's spiritual goal. Aṣṭāngayoga in the Sūtras of Patañjali is a scheme of practices for beginners or those below average (Adhama koṭi). It recommends perfecting the body, senses, and mind. A sound mind needs a sound body and the senses. To overcome their weaknesses, they must be conquered and controlled to achieve the final goal of gradually cultivating well-being and social welfare.

Self-restraints (Yamas) and codes of cultivation (Niyamas) form a good combination of such a morality by practicing which not only an individual person cultivates his body, senses and mind and performs duties for the welfare but also by that process the practitioner attains a state where discriminate knowledge emanates in the practitioner and hence they virtues that rationalize our all the four categories of desires that are artha, kāma, dharma and mokṣa and manages them in a way that they respectively in Household, wanderer and renunciate stages of human life are satisfied and become Puruṣārtha that is, Artha Puruṣārtha, Kāma and Dharma and Mokṣa Puruṣārtha. Brahmacharya, a stage of life, is to study and learn all sorts of skills and dharma related to living and satisfying the Artha and Kāma categories of desires in the household, and the dharma category in the wanderer stages of life. Desires are cultivated through knowledge, and that is the cause of incentive to duties. When duties are performed, they are exchanged for the soundness, happiness, or gross welfare of the person/persons for whom they are performed, and what is exchanged is called values. This is one reason the Gītā defines yoga as expertise in performing duties (Yogaḥ karmaśu kauśalam). Kauśala is the skill to perform even difficult duties in difficult situations with great fitness. This is the Gītā's view of yoga: an agent detached from success and failure, gain and loss, and other conflicting situations performs duties for duty's sake (Samatvam yogamuchyate, Gītā 2/48)**.**

II. Principles of Moral Cultivation of an Individual

1. Restraints (Yama)- it comprises five sorts of abstentions (**Ahiṃsā satyāsteyabrahmacharyāparigrahā yamāḥ**, YS 2/30)-

- Abstention from falsehood and deceitful conduct and, positively, to be honest in thinking and speaking, that is, to express the actions and reactions as per the state of affairs, is called 'Satya'. To speak what is heard and experienced as per se, without deviation, is Truth (satya).
- Abstention from hurting anyone through physical injury, speech, and thoughts is non-violence (Ahiṃsā). It includes the absence of oppression and violence toward living beings by all means and at all times, a virtue called non-violence (Ahiṃsā).
- Abstention from stealing (Asteya)- grabbing possessions on which others have a right by force or by deceiving and exploiting, or without honest labor- is called stealing,
- Abstention from libidinous passions and irregular sexual hunger, and controlling immoral wasting of semen, is Celibacy (Brahmacarya). It is practicing full control over the sex organs, the organs of generation.
- Abstention from possessions (aparigraha)- it is the abnegation of the attitude of hoarding up capital, things, and gifts.

Practice of Vows (Yamas) from the unconditional perspective –
Patanjali's description of these restraints has both ethical and spiritual importance, with universal appeal. An ordinary person's observance of the vows is **conditional**. It de pends on person, time, space, and occasion. But **unconditional** observance is not rela tive to any person, time, space, or occasion. This makes the vows universal, without limitation by person, time, space, or occasion; therefore, they are called **Sārvabhauma Dharmas** (Virtues universal in nature). A seeker of Samādhi gradually follows them as a great vow (Mahāvrata) and attains wonderful powers. An account is given as follows-
Benefits of accomplishment of the five great vows
It is not possible to cover even essential elements in a short presentation. However, given the importance and necessity of these features, we present an account of some dimensions of this Yogasūtra below. Let us analyze them to know the conditions under which the vows act as universal virtue in view of the sūtra '**jātideśakālasama yānavachinnāḥ sārvabhaumā mahāvratam** (sūtra 2/31).

2. YAMAS. Yamas are virtues; they are codes of conduct, prohibitive in nature. They are universal moral vows or restraints. All members of society should practice them regardless of time, place, occasion, or status. They are virtues because they benefit society.

The uniqueness of practicing Yamas is that, when practiced with perception limited to a certain class, space, time, or occasion, they are 'vows' about disciplining and performing duties in society. However, if the practitioner practices them without any boundary of class, place, time, or circumstances, Aṇubratas are transformed into Mahāvratas (Great vows) in Jainism and in the Philosophy of Yoga as well. Apart from the five vows, Gandhi has added fearlessness and love to the list of virtues, the basic core of the way of life. How can the Yamas be practiced without limitation of class, space, time, and particular occasion? Patañjali's answer is: when they are practiced without limitation of individuals, places, time, and occasion—without any sense of difference—they become the Great vow, for example, non-violence. If one takes a vow that he will not kill animals except fish, it will be a practice of non-violence based on class; if one takes a vow that he will not kill any animal during pilgrimage, it is a kind of non-violence limited by place; if one takes a vow that he will not kill animals during full moon night or during ekādasī fasting, it will be a non-violence based on time; if one takes a vow that he will not kill animals during marriage or birthday celebration, it is a kind of non-violent practice based on occasion. Similarly, practices of other Yamas can be generalized to all times, places, and occasions; this is the Great Vow (Mahāvratam, YS 2/31). The question is: why should one follow the Yamas, and how can they benefit the practitioner? Patañjali's answer is very simple.

- **Non-violence** - If one masters the practice of non-violence, all living beings, even wild animals like snakes, lions, wolves, etc., around him and insects abandon the sense of enmity toward their hunts. Enmity toward any, even the violent animals, is removed. This establishes non-violence in life (Ahiṃsāpratiṣṭhāyām tatsannidhau vairatyāgaḥ, 2/35).
- **Satya-** The practitioner must think, speak the truth, and follow the truth, which is the Vow. If the practice of Satya is followed as a great Vow, it becomes well mastered and matured, and the aspirant then gains the position of a shelter or substratum for the fruits of the duties. He/she attains the state of a provider of the fruits of the duties, even of those duties one has not performed. His/her boons and curses come true. He controls actions and their

fruition. If he says 'go to heaven,' one goes to heaven, and likewise, he becomes the substratum of the fruits of the actions (Satya pratiṣṭhāyām kriyāphalā āśrayatvam, 2/36).

- **Non-stealing-** to usurp anyone's possession deceitfully by deceptive means and illegal claim of ownership is stealing. Hiding taxes, dowries, bribing, etc., are also kinds of stealing. Respecting others' possessions and earning possessions honestly are not stealing.
- If one masters the practices of non-stealing, all jewels, prosperity, etc., come to him from all corners (Asteyapratiṣṭhāyām sarvaratnopsthānam**,** YS 2/37).
- **Brahmacharya**-it is celibacy. Always restraining sexual intercourse at the mind, body, and speech levels by all means in all stages of life, and keeping the seminal fluid protected, is Celibacy. When one attains complete mastery of celibacy, a divine energy springs in his/her mind, senses, intellect, and whole body. No ordinary person can rival him/her. If celibacy is mastered, the aspirant is privileged with such a power that no ordinary person can equal his power (Brahmacharapratiṣṭhāyām vīryalābhaḥ, YS 2/38).
- **Aparigraha**- Collection and ownership of capital, wealth, and prosperity by selfish interest, lust, and allegiances is possession (parigraha), and the absence of such sense about possessions is non-possession.

If the practice of **aparigraha** is gradually matured, the practitioner acquires the power of knowing all events of this and his earlier births (aparigrahasthairye janmakathāntā sambodhaḥ YS 2/39. We have seen that the Pātanjala sūtra (YS 2.31) and Vyāsabhāṣya on it clearly state how the vows are transformed into great vows. Now, let us illustrate it with an example of non-violence (Ahimsā).

- **Class-based Example-** A person who does business of killing and selling flesh for the maintenance of his family can practice non-violence if he takes a vow that he will not kill any other animal except fish. But if he takes a vow that he will not kill any animal.
- **Space-based example-** If a violent person takes the vow that he will not do violence during pilgrimage or at the places of worship he visits, he practices non-violence based on a specific space, but that is transformed into a great vow if he practices non-violence at all places.
- **Time-based example-**if a person takes a vow that he will kill no animal on Rāmanavamī, Kṛṣṇa janmāṣṭamī, full-moon and no-moon nights, his practice of non-violence is based on time. However, if he does vows of non-violence for all time, i.e., the present and the time to come, his vow is called a great vow.
- **Occasion-based example: If** a person takes a vow that he will kill no animal except on the occasion of his marriage, his practice of non-violence is based on a specific occasion. Nevertheless, if he follows non-violence for all occasions, including marriage, his vow is called the great vow. The same applies to other vows, such as truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession.

3. Codes of self-cultivation (**Niyamas**)- Codes of self-cultivation (Niyamas) are prescriptions for the moral cultivation of individual persons. There are five in number, as mentioned in the Yogasūtras (Śaucha santoṣa tapaḥ svādhyāye śvara praṇdhānāni niyamāḥ, YS 2/32) They are means that process and gradually cultivate individuals. The individuals avail themselves of the return in proportion to their self-cultivation.

- **Purification (Śaucha)-** it belongs to our practices regarding external and internal purification. Purification of the dirtiness of the body, clothes, etc.,

caused by soil, water, etc.; eating and drinking consecrated food as prescribed in the scriptures, treating them as pure; and removing mental impurities like attachment, interest, jealousy, aggression, etc., are external and internal purification, respectively.

If Gradual cultivation of the purification, one is detached from his own body and detached from the sense of associating or lust for touching another's body with sexual desire (Śauchātsvāñgajugupsā parairasansargaḥ, YS 2/40)

- **Contentment** (Santoṣa)-to keep satisfied with whatever fruits one gets by performing his duties, whatever he gets by his prārabdha, and whatever state and circumstances one is privileged to live in, and not to have any lust or wish is called 'contentment'. To satisfy desires with what already belongs to one is contentment. No mundane pleasure or happiness can match the infinite bliss one gets by being disinterested and desireless. No happiness rivals that of being desireless. That is the utmost happiness (Santoṣādanuttama sukhalābhaḥ, YS 2/42).
- **Penance** (tapa)- The capacity of abiding the pairs of opposites like hunger and thirst, heat and cold, standing and sitting, happiness and suffering, is called penance. By practicing it, the ills of the body and senses are destroyed, and the aspirant's body and senses then enjoy sound health, purity, and light. Its body and senses mature to perceive, smell, hear, touch, taste, and think the subtlest form of them that ordinarily cannot be reached (Kāyendriya siddhiraśuddhikṣayā tapasaḥ, YS 2/43). Study of the self (svādhyāya) is the learning of the Vedas, scriptures, the expressions of wise great personalities, and introspection (YS 2/1). Aspirants should identify errors and defects with the wisdom they gain through learning and introspection. By gaining expertise in svādhyāya, the aspirant can visualize the deity he wills (Svādhyāyādiṣṭa devatā samprayogaḥ, YS 2/44).
- **Surrender to God** (Īśvara praṇidhāna YS 1/23)- Dedication of duties to God that amounts to removal of doership and enables one to perform his duties for the sake of God is called 'Īśvara praṇidhāna '.

A Yogi accomplishes Samadhi if he/she Surrenders to God (Samādhi siddhirīśvara praṇidhānāt**,** YS 2.45). Why should the practices under Niyamas be followed? Patañjali responds that by the practices of purification, one gets detachment from one's own bodily organs and unwillingness to associate with the other's body for sensuous touch and sexual intercourse (YS 2/40). In addition, one achieves purity of his inner sense or thoughts, blissful mindfulness, one-pointedness of the chitta, control over the senses, and fitness for realization; these five merits are also achieved through purifying practices (YS 2/41). With mature practice of contentment, impurities are destroyed, and one attains the highest category of happiness. By getting the firmness of penance, the body and senses are perfected. Mastery of self-learning and self-knowledge may give one the capacity to commune with the deity he desires. By practicing surrender to God, one attains Samādhi (spiritual absorption, YS 2/45). Why should one practice Niyamas? On this question, Patanjali answers that by practicing them, one attains purification; this sense of purity makes one dislike attachment to one's own body, and, considering the impurities of others' bodies, one avoids mixing with others' bodies. By practicing contentment, one attains the highest happiness. He experiences that all the mundane pleasures are not even equal to the sixteenth part of the happiness achieved by the cessation of the desires. By practicing penance, one attains perfection of the body and senses, increasing their potency. With mature svādhyāya practice, one

gains the power to commune with the deity one desires. With maturity in the practice of Īśvara praṇidhāna, one attains success in spiritual absorption.

4. Postures (**Āsana**)- it is a practice for keeping the body disciplined to help smooth meditation (YS 2/46 and Vyāśabhāṣya on). One can practice any posture he feels comfortable with to control the breath and concentration. Padmāsana, Bhadrāsana, Vīrāsana, Svastikāsana, Vajrāsana, Śavāsana, and Mayūrāsana are some of the popular Āsanas. By the maturity of the practice of Āsanas, the disturbances of the pairs of opposites cease, and the bodily perfection comprising amiability, beauty, charm, strength and adamantine hardness that are called (Kāyasampat) is achieved. By disciplining cognition (grahaṇa), consciousness (svarupa), egoism (asmitā), analysis (anavaya), and meanings (artha), the senses and mind are mastered. Then the attainment of the highest speed of the body is mind-like velocity, the power of experiencing the things not in contact with the body, and the conquering of nature (pradhāna) is accomplished.

5. Breath-control (**Praṇāyama**)- it is the practice of commanding the breath (prāṇavāyu) by controlling inhalation, retention, and exhalation (breathing in and breathing out, and is performed when the practice of postures is made steady (YS 2/54). With mastery of prāṇāyāma, the covering of the effulgence is destroyed. Covering is ignorance and the consequent actions through body, senses, and intellective knowledge that cause the cycle of birth and death; breath-control practices destroy it, and one achieves the fitness of the mind for concentration.

6. Abstraction (**pratyāhāra**)-it is practiced for controlling the senses by withdrawing them from their objects with the purpose of introspection. Through the practice of pratyāhāra, the senses are subjugated to the highest degree, and the practitioner becomes jitendriya, one who has conquered the senses (YS 2/54).

7. Concentration (Dhāraṇā): After practice of pratyāhāra, the mind acquires the capability of concentrating. Concentration is the practice of fixing the mind (chitta) on a point –internal or external (YS 3/1).

8. Meditation (**Dhyāna**) is the practice of regularizing the flow of the mind on the very point it fixes; in other words, continuation of the idea of the point the mind fixes. The ideation should prolong without a break or deviation from the fixed idea (Deśa bandhaśchitasya dhāraṇā YS 3/2).

9. Spiritual absorption (Samādhi)–the concentration is transformed into Samādhi when it is devoid of the difference between the concentrator and the point concentrated. Only the illuminating consciousness that is concentrated is perceived, YS 3/3.

The symbolic name given to the trio -dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and Samādhi is Sanyama, in which all three act on to one goal. It is an internal part of cognitive spiritual absorption rather than one of the preceding five paths of the eightfold scheme. If sanyama is conquered, the wisdom, the highest brilliance, illuminates; the intellect is transformed to a stage fit to be absorbed in transcendental consciousness. The cessation of mental formations/dispositions, suffering, and the fruition of actions (karmas) or past impressions, and attachments to desires in qualities taken together, are termed the cessation of vṛttis of the chitta. Yoga is the discipline of sound health at different levels of their requirements and is open to all people without any geographical or cultural boundaries. As observed above, the practices and maturity of any of its practices sublimate energy and fitness, based on which even an ordinary person can do extraordinary activities

and qualify better for harmony, happiness, and peace inside and outside. It can accomplish all worldly prosperity and lastly freedom, that is, discriminative knowledge, the highest goal of the phenomenal soul. However, critics found methodological and philosophical errors in yoga philosophy.

- The abnegating method of the modifications of the phenomenal self (citta) for the soundness of body and mind amounts to cessation of life or at least the liveliness of life. The philosophy of restrictions opposes all possible uses of the senses and the freedom of the senses and mind. Even if we accept that yoga teaches better uses of the senses without making them diseased or losing their energy.
- The philosophy of abnegation of the modification of citta and the concentration and their methods are contradictory. The former is a method of decapitating from the senses and their objects, while the latter prescribes concentrating on a point that may be the citta itself. Agnostics in yoga philosophy observe a dichotomy between freedom from the objects of the senses and modifications of citta, and fixation on a single object. Two problems arise: Yoga is a process of freeing the citta, and it is also employed for a task other than the senses' natural function. Is it wise to practice concentrating on a point while leaving its openness to the diversity of the universe? The self is not free to swim freely. Logically, the self cannot be the object of concentration and the agent of concentration simultaneously. If the self enjoys both capacities at once, what is there to be freed from this binary?

According to Śānkara Advaita, the sheaths from Annamaya to the ānandamaya sheath (kośa) are products of prakṛti that make the phenomenal self captive to prakṛti's sheaths. To move to the next step, one must be freed from the captivity of the earlier steps. After being freed from all the earlier sheaths, the Ānanda layer may seem real; therefore, to be freed from that layer, one must concentrate on it. Concentration on this topmost layer of prakṛti frees one from the earlier layers and finally helps the aspirant understand that the Ānanda layer is also not Brahman. It is very close to Brahman, but not Brahman; that is the difference. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, Ānanda is a product of sattva, and sattva is a quality of prakṛti. Discriminative knowledge through concentration arises, and the phenomenal self frees the real puruṣa from the ascribed puruṣa. It realizes that the puruṣa for which prakṛti was working is a byproduct; prakṛti's fabrication and the real Puruṣa are different. The śāstras aim to show the hollowness of mundane prosperity because, unless one knows its hollowness, one cannot think of getting rid of it. Gradually, by gradually freeing oneself from all captives, one can live a sound life; only by living the sound life can one purify the self; and only in the purified self can the spirituality graced by God dawn for final samādhi.